

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

1. Name of Property

historic name The Waltower Building

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 823 Walnut Street [N/A] not for publication

city or town Kansas City [N/A] vicinity

state Missouri code MO county Jackson code 095 zip code 64105

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this
[X] nomination [] request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the
National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my
opinion, the property [X] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered
significant [] nationally [] statewide [X] locally.
(See continuation sheet for additional comments [].)

Signature of certifying official/Title Claire F. Blackwell/Deputy SHPO

Date 27 June 01

Missouri Department of Natural Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria.
(See continuation sheet for additional comments [].)

Signature of certifying official/Title

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

[] entered in the National Register
See continuation sheet [].

[] determined eligible for the
National Register
See continuation sheet [].

[] determined not eligible for the
National Register.

[] removed from the
National Register

[] other, explain
See continuation sheet [].

Signature of the Keeper

Date

5. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	1	0
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district		
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site		
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	0	0
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	0	0
		0	0
		0	0
		1	0

Name of related multiple property listing.

N/A

Number of contributing resources
previously listed in the National
Register.

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Function

COMMERCE/TRADE: business

Current Functions

COMMERCE/TRADE: business

7. Description

Architectural Classification

LATE 19th AND EARLY 20th CENTURY

AMERICAN MOVEMENTS: Skyscraper

Materials

foundation concrete

walls brick

stone

roof asphalt

other terra cotta

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

☒ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history

☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

☒ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

Property is:

☐ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

☐ B removed from its original location.

☐ C a birthplace or grave.

☐ D a cemetery.

☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

☐ F a commemorative property.

☐ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT
ARCHITECTURE

Periods of Significance

1929

Significant Dates

1929

Significant Person(s)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Wiser, Albert C., architect
Manhattan Construction Co., builder

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested

☐ previously listed in the National Register

☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register

☐ designated a National Historic Landmark

☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey

☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

Primary location of additional data:

☒ State Historic Preservation Office

☐ Other State Agency

☐ Federal Agency

☒ Local Government City Hall

☒ University Western Historic Manuscripts Collection

☒ Other:

Name of repository: Kansas City Public Library

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one acre

UTM References

A. Zone Easting Northing
15 363250 4329470

B. Zone Easting Northing

C. Zone Easting Northing

D. Zone Easting Northing

[] See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Cydney E. Millstein

organization Architectural and Historical Research, LLC date March 2, 2001

street & number P.O. Box 22551 telephone 816.363.0567

city or town Kansas City state Missouri zip code 64113

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional Items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name The Locust Group, LLC

street & number P.O. Box 10110 telephone 816.561.9210

city or town Kansas City state Missouri zip code 64171

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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Summary

The Waltower Building, located at 823 Walnut Street, Kansas City, Missouri, is a twelve-story reinforced concrete building featuring a brick exterior with stone and terra cotta embellishments. Designed with elements of the Gothic Revival style by Kansas City architect Albert C. Wiser and built by the Manhattan Construction Company, Muskogee, Oklahoma, the Waltower Building was completed in 1929. Its three-part vertical block scheme imparts a stone veneer at the base level, a contrasting brick shaft, while portions of the prominent, canted and set back terminating level are articulated in terra cotta. Measuring three bays by seven bays, the building contains 59,000 square feet. Currently, it is partially occupied.

Directly to the east and north of the Waltower Building is the National Register-listed Scarritt Building and Scarritt Arcade (1906-1907), to the south is the Fidelity Bank and Trust Company Building (1931) and directly to the west is a surface parking lot. Further surrounding the Waltower Building within the Central Business District are other large-scale commercial properties dating generally from the early 1900's through the 1930s.

Although the storefront level was modified in 1958, the Waltower Building has retained the majority of its historic features to convey its historic significance. In good condition, its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association has been retained.

Elaboration

Exterior

The main façade faces west. The storefront façade, modified in 1958 with ceramic tile, features a non-symmetrical recessed main entrance, gradually corbeled from the street level. Flanking fenestration features original plate glass windows with non-original contrasting tile surrounds. A limestone veneer embellishes the entire second story, as well as the center bays of the third story, where it terminates in polygonal cul-de-lampes placed between terra cotta tiles.

Generally speaking, the fenestration of the west façade of the central shaft of the Waltower Building is consistent throughout and is original. Steel sash, double-hung, one-over-one-windows separated by wide brick spandrels and continuous brick piers at the end bays dominate, except at the central bays of the second and third stories. In fair to good condition, the original, broad steel sash segmental arched tripartite casement style

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windows and smaller steel sash casement units windows are extant at the second and third story, respectively. The end bays of the second through third stories and the remainder of the fenestration through the eleventh story of the west façade features steel sash, one-over-one, double-hung units with terra cotta sills.

The articulation of the west façade of the Waltower Building is repeated at the south façade which is sloped. Continuing from the modified main façade storefront level, the ceramic tile wraps to the far west bay of the south façade. Likewise, stone veneer distinguishes the second and third stories. Fenestration of the lower levels is similar to that of the main façade, where the original wide, segmental arched and rectangular steel framed casement units are extant. The original plate glass windows separated from the casement windows by double rows of terra cotta tiles have been infilled at the far west bays. The original recessed, double-door entrance with a wide, tripartite transom, placed at the fifth bay (moving west to east) has been partially boarded up. Terra cotta tiles, matching the original tiles of the west façade, are placed on the intrados of the entrance. Situated at the far east bays of the main façade, the original secondary entrances have been boarded-up.

Fenestration of the upper stories of the south façade, like that of the main façade, features steel sash, one-over-one, double-hung units with terra cotta sills; windows at the central bays are paired. Additional features that define the south façade, including the continuous brick piers and spandrels that separate the fenestration, as well as the stone cul-de-lamps and terra cotta panels, are carried over from the articulation of the building's main façade and remain in fair to good condition.

The vocabulary of the far east bay of the south façade, including the canted top story and set backs, stonework and terra cotta, continues to the far south bay of the east or alley façade. Fenestration features steel sash, three-over-three, double hung sash units; placed in threes at the center bay. The original windows and double door entry of the first story level have been boarded up.

Hidden at the first five stories by the adjacent Scarritt Arcade, the north façade of the Waltower Building (a common wall), is characterized by steel sash, double-hung windows. With few exceptions, the eastern and western bays of the north façade feature three-over-three units, while the central portion features two-over-two units. Additionally, one-over-one units are placed at the far west bay of the seventh floor and below the penthouse level at the western third of the building.

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Undoubtedly the most interesting character defining element of the Waltower Building is located at the upper zone, where the end bays of the 11th story are canted and capped with terra cotta tiles, directing the final story to set back from the shaft. At the Walnut Street façade, the corners of the penthouse are set back at 45° angles. Brick piers of the west and south facades are punctuated at the penthouse level with modified terra cotta tabernacle forms faced with trefoil and quatrefoil patterning that rise above the roofline. Basket weave patterned brick and castellated dentils at the cornice further articulate the penthouse level at the main and south facades. Fenestration features multipaned steel sash windows at the south façade and one-over-one units at the set back corners.

Additional features of the Waltower Building include a tiled hip roofed, elevator penthouse, with metal sash, two-over-two, double-hung windows separated by piers, (placed at the northern half of the building); and original wrought-iron grillwork at the west and south façades.

Interior

Over the years, the original interior of the Waltower Building has been modified and consequently, no historic features are extant. However, the upper floor corridors, as well as the elevator lobbies, generally are intact.

Future Plans

Currently there are proposed plans for the rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of the Waltower Building. Future plans include rehabilitation of the exterior and interior spaces. Plans for the project will be prepared in accordance with *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*. Once the proposed plans are completed, they will be submitted to the Missouri State Historic Preservation Office and the National Park Service for review and compliance.

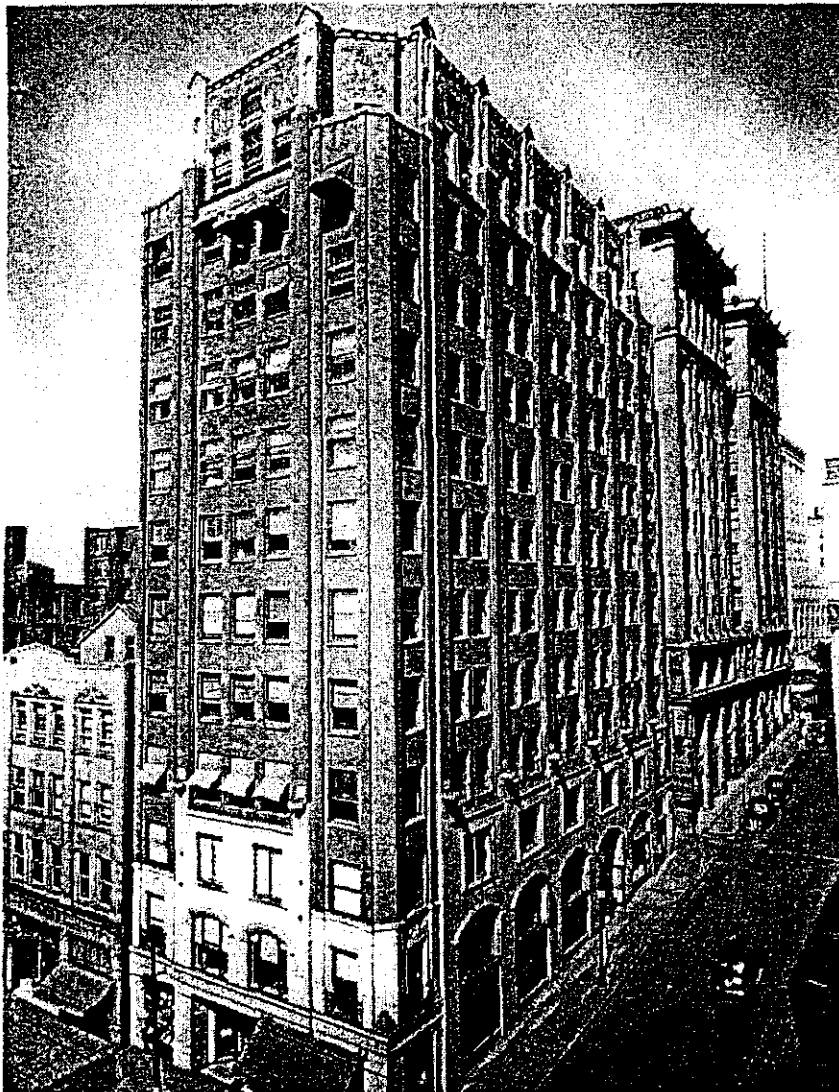
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The Waltower Building c. 1935

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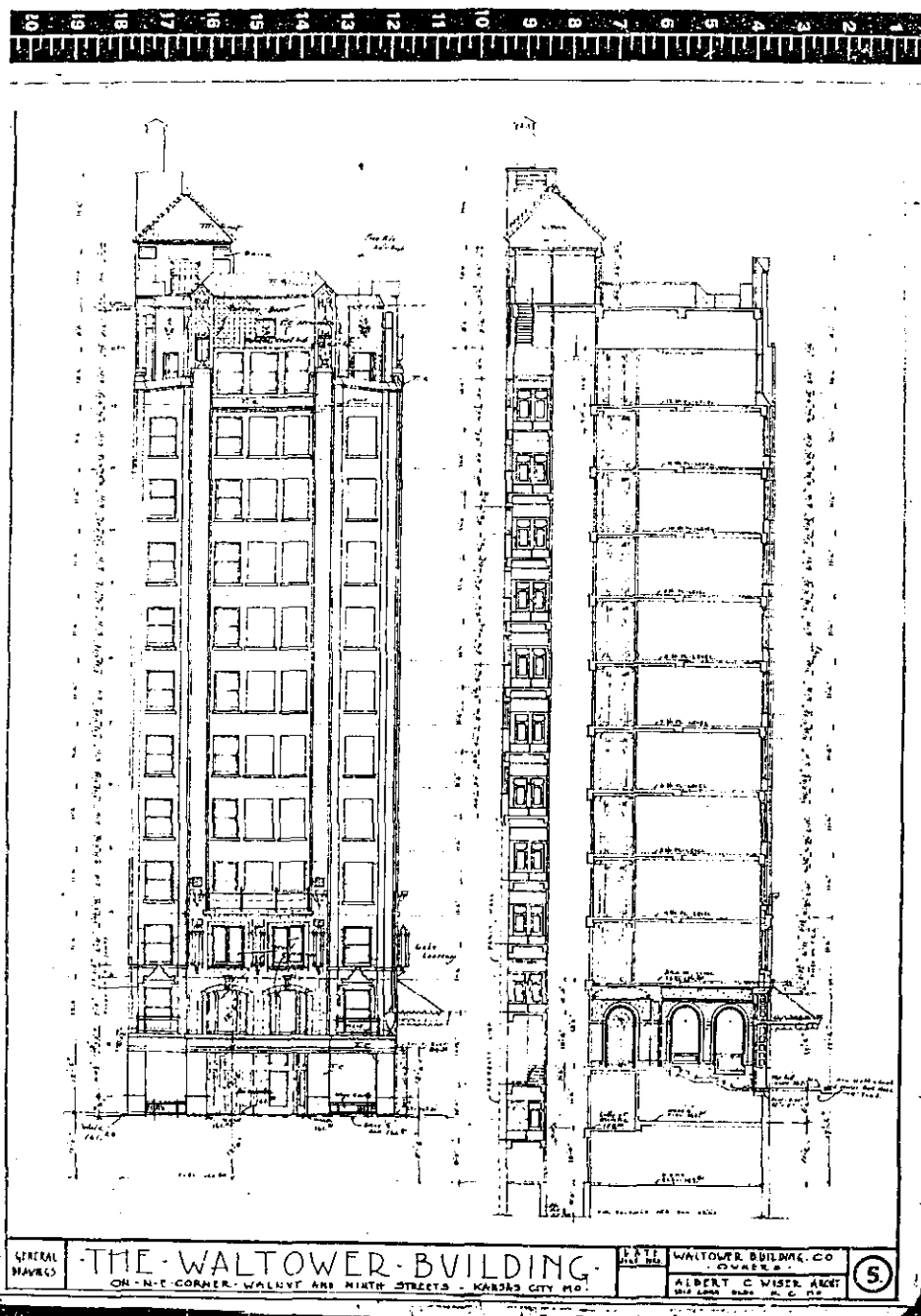
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The Waltower Building: Main or West Elevation



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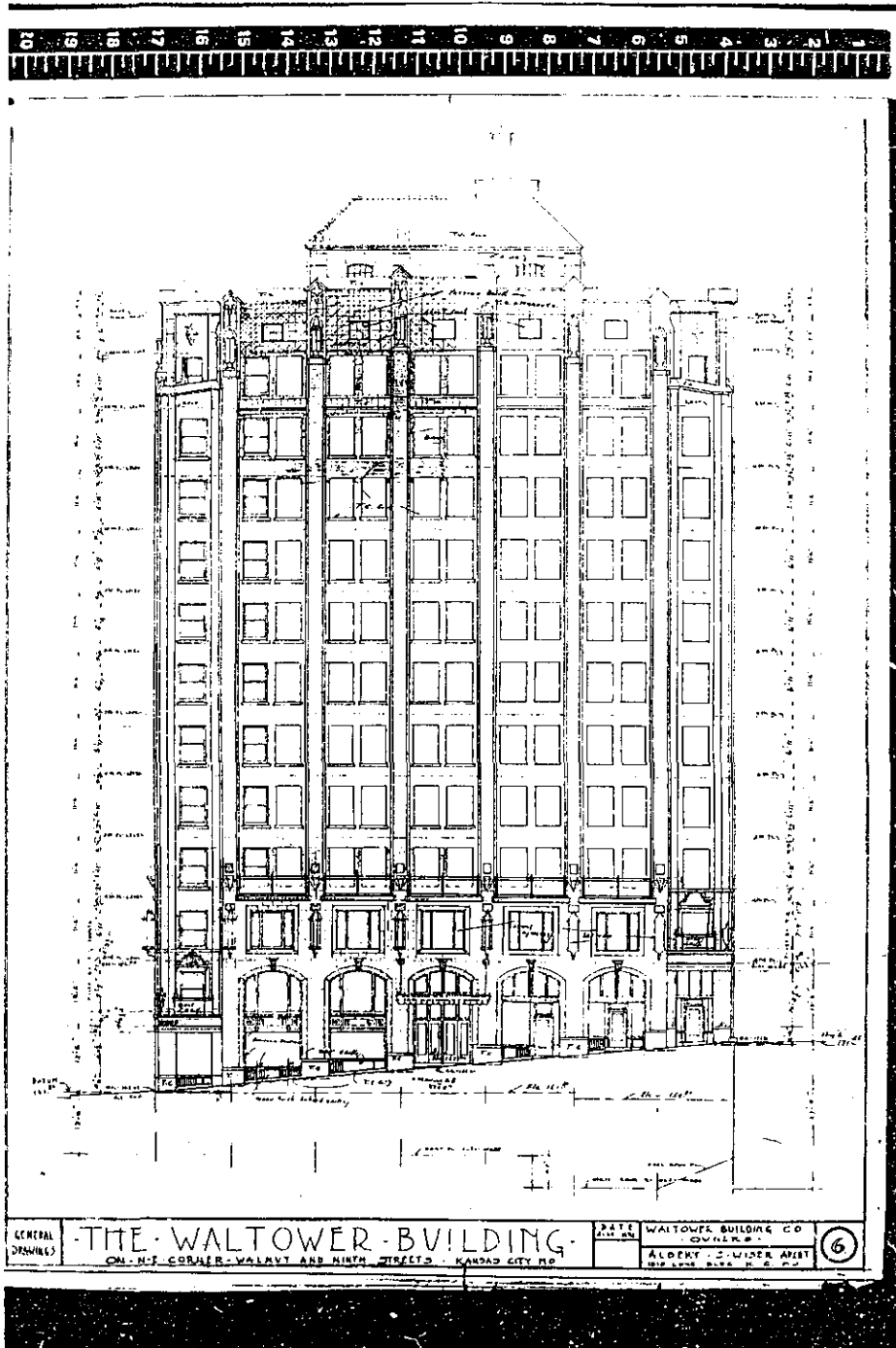
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The Waltower Building: South Elevation



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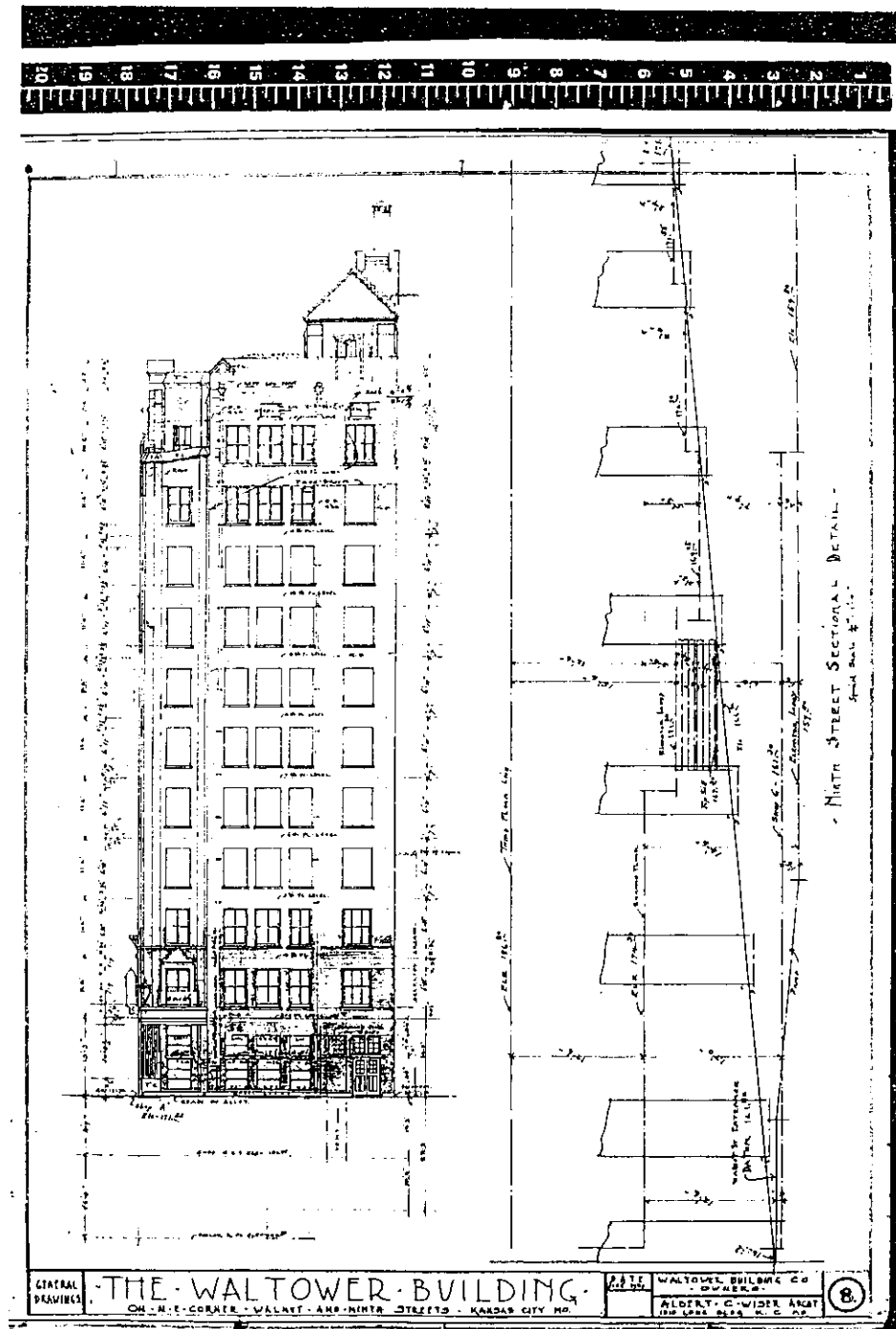
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The Waltower Building: Alley or East Elevation



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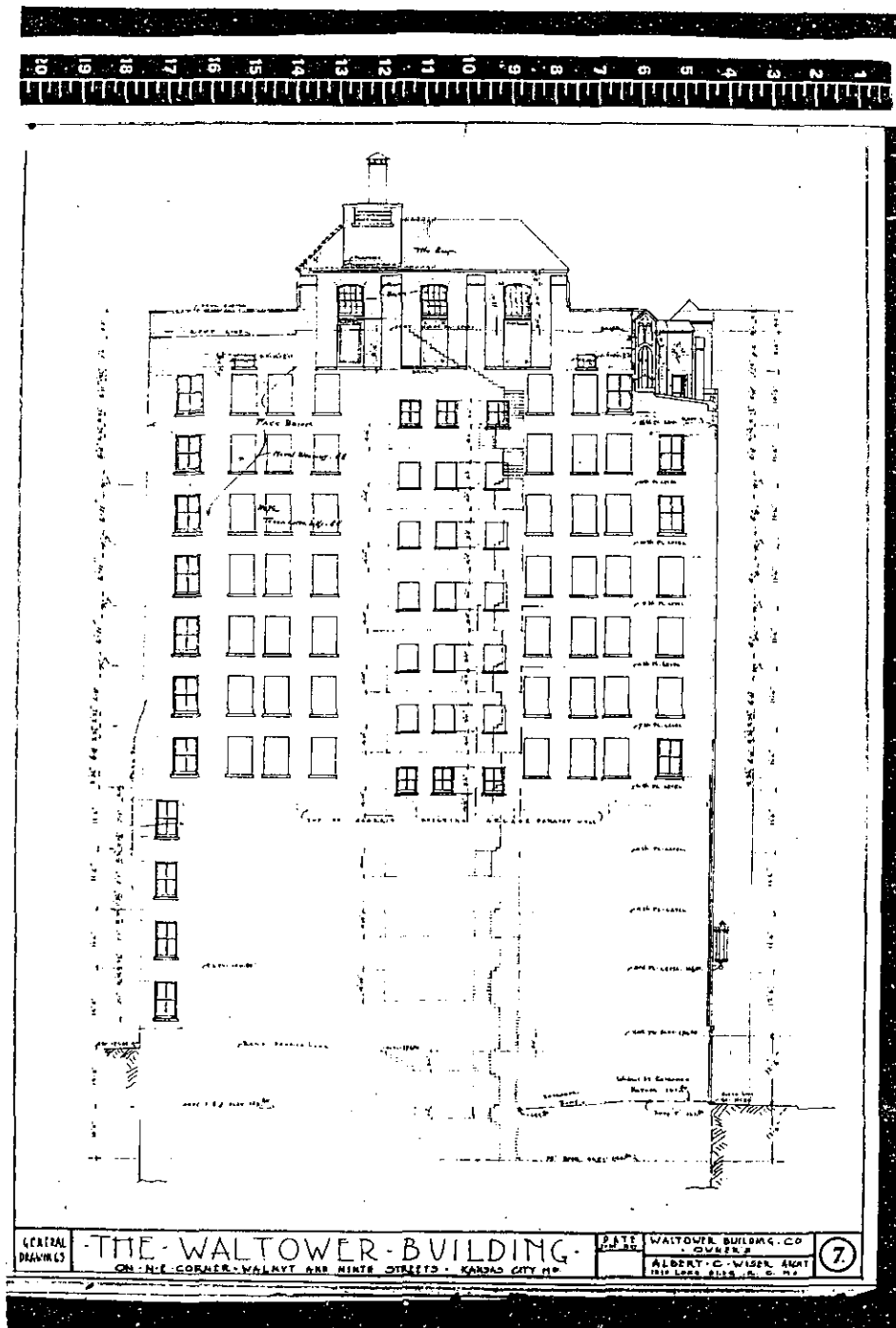
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The Waltower Building: North Elevation



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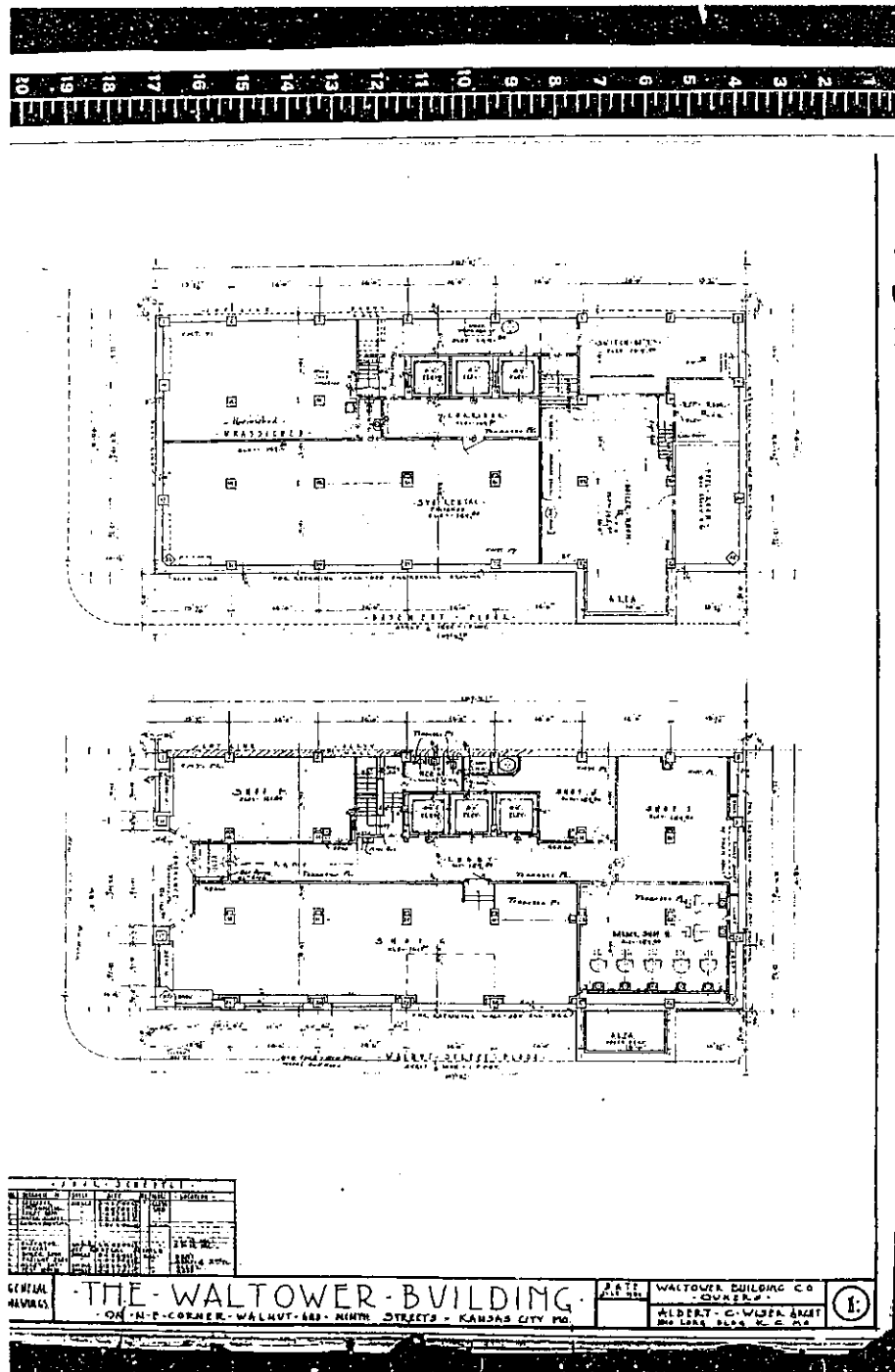
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The Waltower Building: Plans for the Basement and Walnut Street Floor



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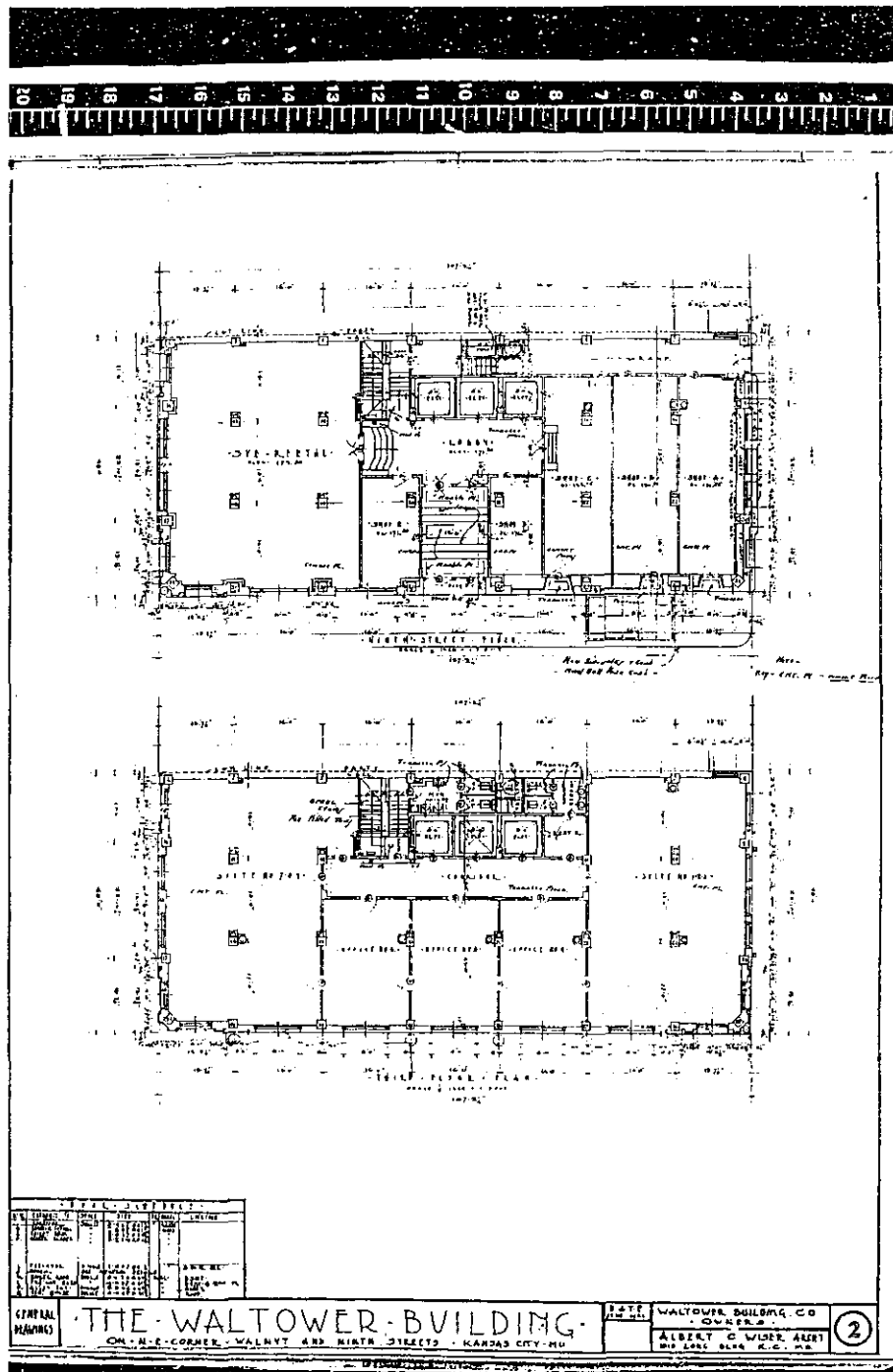
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The Waltower Building: Plans for the Ninth Street and Third floors



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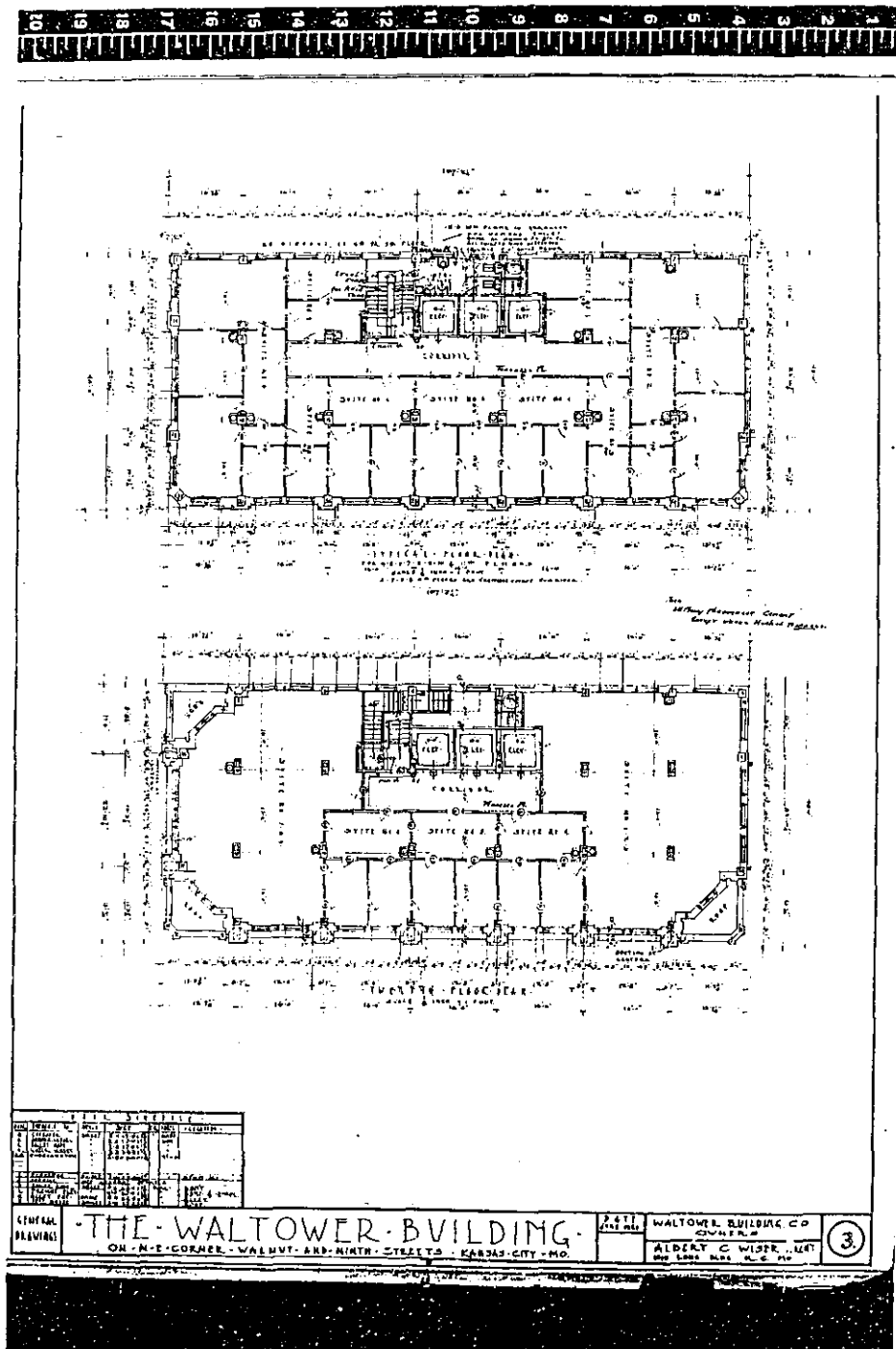
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The Waltower Building: Plans for a typical floor and the top story



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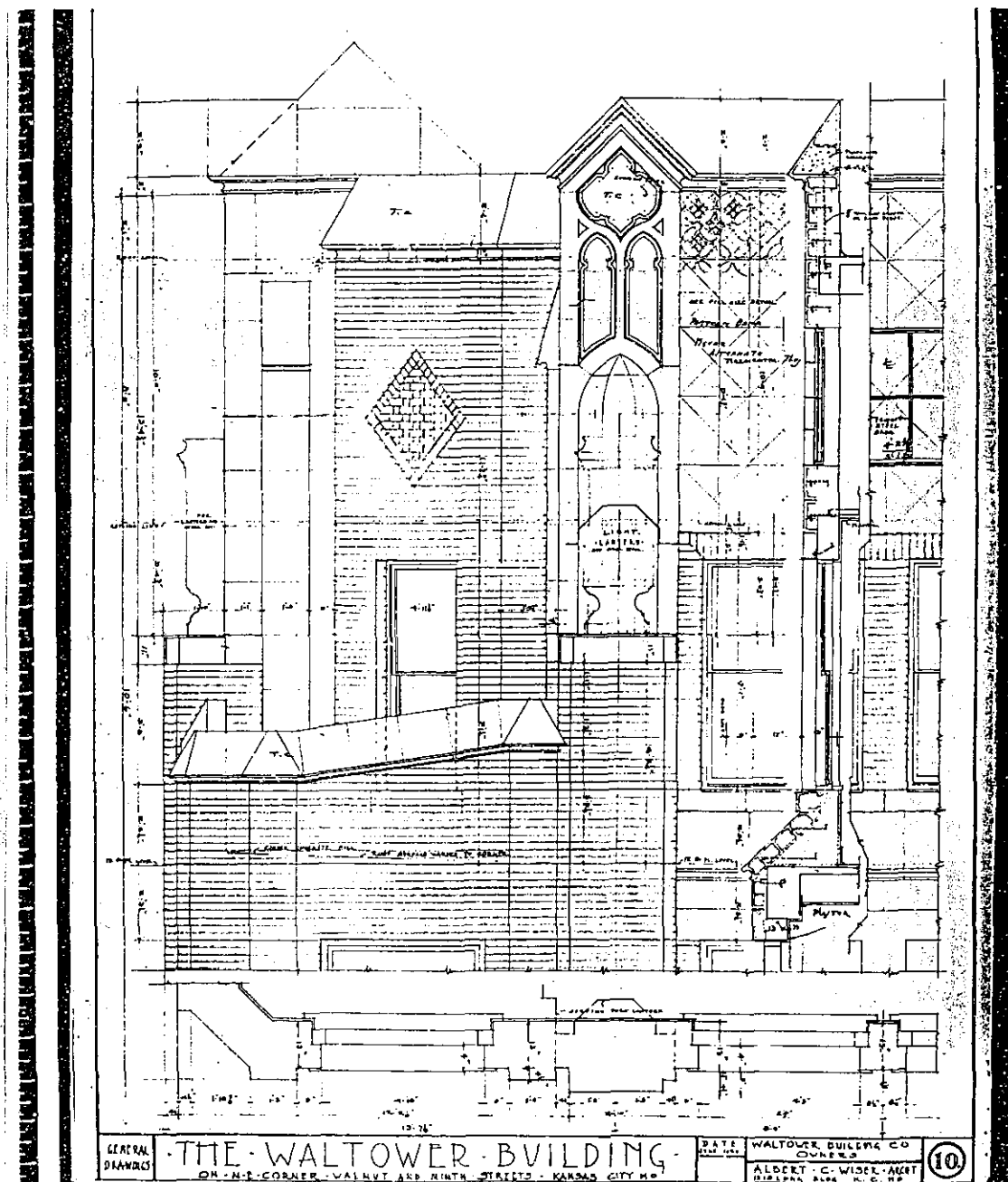
The Waltower Building: Plans for the attic, roof and penthouse



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The Waltower Building: Penthouse details



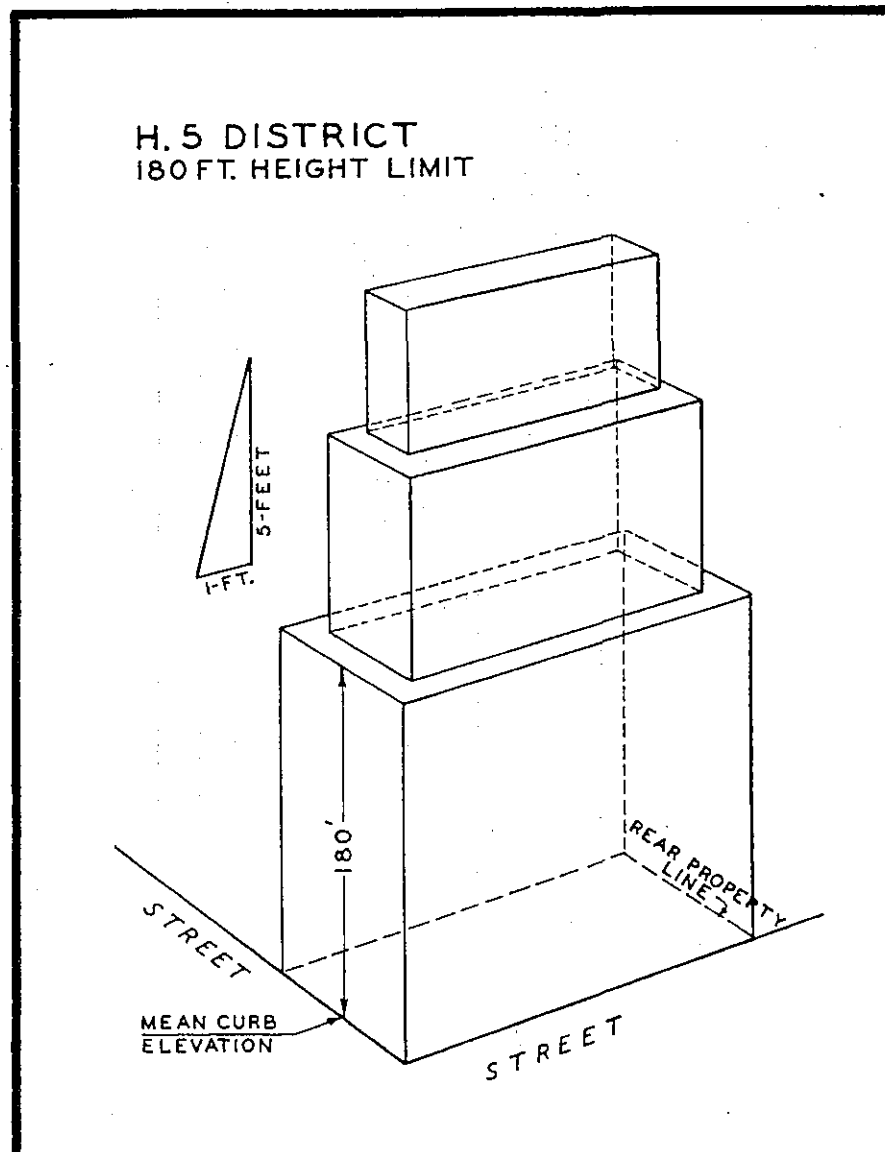
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Source: Zoning Ordinance of Kansas City, Missouri, No. 45608, June 4, 1923.

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Summary

The Waltower Building, located at 823 Walnut Street, Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri, is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and C and is significant in the following areas: COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT: Built in 1929, the Waltower Building belongs to a group of central business district buildings constructed during the most consequential building boom at the time in Kansas City's history. Along with several other high rise properties, the Waltower Building helped to create a major civic center which prompted Kansas City to boast of being eighth in the nation in the number of buildings ten stories in height. Furthermore, the Waltower Building is associated with the early development of the city's modern skyline. ARCHITECTURE: Designed in 1929 by the noted Kansas City architect Albert C. Wiser in the later part of his career, the architectural treatment of the Waltower Building reflects the provisions in Kansas City's 1923 zoning ordinance that required setbacks on high-rise buildings, thus dictating the overall form and massing of this commercial facility. As an early example of this architectural type, it clearly illustrates the transition between the rectangular block and the vertical block with setbacks that became a popular architectural idiom during the preceding decade. It is also significant as Wiser's only known design in Kansas City when he was a solo practitioner. The period of significance is 1929, the date of the building's construction.

Elaboration

In the summer of 1929, prior to the devastating stock market crash of October 28, it was reported that Kansas City enjoyed witnessing the largest recorded building campaign in previous history. The downtown area was undergoing a major improvement while offering employment to nearly 4,000 craftsmen—the builders of the new office and retail buildings. The central business district was to change drastically as high rise buildings, some reaching over 15 stories, altered the city's existing skyline. Overall investments in land acquisition and building construction totaled more than 15 million dollars, while it was estimated that another 10 million dollars in intended building construction was sitting on architectural drafting boards.¹

¹ "Improvements-Down Town Projects," *The Kansas City Star*, 21 July 1929, n. p. See also "Wave of Business Building Includes 191 New Stories," *The Kansas City Journal Post*, 18 August 1929, n. p. (These mounted newspaper clippings and others filed at Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library, are not paginated.)

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Within a nine block area of the central business district of Kansas City twelve major projects were either underway or scheduled to begin within a year including the 12-story Waltower Building at 8th and Walnut (1929), the 16-story Professional Building at 11th and Grand, (1929-30), the 10-story 912 Baltimore building (1929-30), the 26-story Bryant Building at 12th and Grand (1930-31), the 36-story Fidelity Bank and Trust Company Building, 9th and Walnut (1929-31), the ten-story Pickwick Hotel (1929-30), located at 10th and McGee, and a 17-story office building located at the southeast corner of 12 and Grand, since demolished. Additionally, the start of Kansas City's most well-known skyscraper, The Power and Light Building, was delayed by a legal controversy. These impressive new commercial projects, not only marked a shift in architectural design from historically-derived design to a more textural and sculptural perspective, but also confirmed the city's trend toward a more commanding skyline.

Another factor that had a definite effect on shaping the central business district and the city's skyward trend in architecture was the adoption of the Zoning Ordinance of June 4, 1923. Section 7 of the ordinance, in regulating permissible building heights, set forth a formula keyed to the general size of the lot. This encouraged the use of graduated setbacks, which in-turn, changed the aesthetic direction in design. The specific ordinance reads thusly:

Section 7 Classification of Heights, 1. Height Districts: (e) Class H-5 District: In a class H-5 district no building shall be erected to a height in excess of 180 feet, except that the building may exceed this height provided that it sets back from all property lines at least one foot for each 5 feet of additional height of the building.²

Although the Waltower Building does not reach the height of 180 feet, it was the second building in Kansas City to mark the course toward this new trend in architecture. Albert C. Wiser, the architect of the new 12-story tower, more than likely took his cue from the Southwestern Bell Telephone Company Building at 324 E. 11th Street. Originally constructed in 1919, the 14-story commercial building received another 14 stories in 1929. The most distinctive element of the addition was the three setback parapets heavily adorned with Gothic Revival-ornamented terra cotta.³ With the

² "Zoning Ordinance of Kansas City, MO. No. 45608." Approved June 4, 1923 with amendments, n.p.

³ The commitment to continue with the Gothic ornamentation appears to have been influenced by the Chicago Tribune Tower, a highly publicized project. See George Ehrlich, *Kansas City, Missouri: An Architectural History, 1826-1976* (Kansas City: HKCF, 1979), 94.

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alteration of the Southwestern Bell building, the metamorphosis in Kansas City's architecture had begun, but it was the Waltower Building that fully instituted the set back in its original design from the start, even before that of the Bryant, Fidelity Bank and Trust Company, and Power and Light buildings mentioned above.

The Waltower Building

On July 21, 1929, the Ricksecker Building, located on the northeast corner of 9th and Walnut Street, was being demolished to make way for the Waltower Building, a new 12-story office space designed with Gothic Revival elements.⁴

On March 20, 1929, the construction of the Waltower was publicly announced and Keyser-Desett Construction Company of Joliet, Illinois, was named as the general contractor. Construction of the new office facility was to begin shortly thereafter.⁵ However, in the summer of 1929 when L. F. Rooney of Muskogee, Oklahoma, was announced as owner and vice-president of the Waltower Building Company, Manhattan Construction Company, controlled by Rooney, was listed as general contractor of the project.⁶ Subsequent reports corroborate that Manhattan Construction was responsible for the excavation of the property, all brick and stone work, as well as all steel and reinforced concrete work for the twelve stories and basement of the 48' x 153' Waltower building.

By October 1929, construction of the Waltower Building had advanced to the third floor and at the close of 1929, the building was partially occupied. During 1930, occupants of the building included insurance companies, accounting and investment firms, as well as law practices. Perhaps the most notable tenant during the first years of the Waltower was the U. S. Immigration Service that occupied most of the ninth floor.

The market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression of the 1930s had an ill effect on the ability of the Waltower Building Company to attain full occupancy of their building. On December 22, 1931, the Waltower Building went into receivership. Rooney and his group had defaulted on three months of deposits toward interest coupons. Although the building is said to have cost \$800,000 to build, in 1934 the building was

⁴ *Kansas City Star*, 21 July 1929, n. p.

⁵ *Western Contractor*, Vol. 55 (March 20, 1929), 26.

⁶ *Western Contractor*, Vol. 56 (July 24, 1929), 32. In subsequent issues, Manhattan Construction Company was listed as the general contractor.

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bought by a group of stockholders on the courthouse steps for a mere \$150,000 plus back taxes amounting to nearly \$30,000.⁷

In 1944 a St. Louis concern, The Confero Paint Company owned by Sam Kopler, purchased the Waltower Building for \$225,000. A cash payment of \$50,000 was made, plus the exchange of a building in St. Louis with a value of \$25,000 in equity. Herbert V. Jones and Company held the balance in mortgage. Guignon Real Estate managed the building, which was fully occupied in 1944.⁸

Tenants of the Waltower Building in 1949 included offices of Mid-Continent Airlines who leased the entire fifth and sixth floors, as well smaller spaces on three other levels. KCKN and WIBW, local broadcasting companies, occupied the third floor; however, law firms remained the majority of Waltower's occupants.⁹

In January 1958 the Kansas City architectural firm of Linscott, Kiene and Haylett prepared designs for a main entrance and lobby alteration to the Waltower Building. Chester A. Dean Construction Company, Kansas City, was named the general contractor for the project. The remodeling of the main entrance called for a marquee to extend the full length of the first story of the main façade and wrap to the Ninth Street corner (this element is not longer extant). Ceramic tile was placed on the exterior in a random pattern to the height of the marquee, covering the original brick façade. The design also called for an expanse of large plate glass providing access to the building lobby and the offices on the ground floor. Among other changes, the original interior doors were replaced with plate glass units framed in aluminum.¹⁰

On July 1, 1959 the Waltower property was purchased from S. M. Kopler, St. Louis, by a group of Kansas City investors headed by Carl Ragsdale, then executive vice-president of L. J. Baer and Company. Ragsdale's entourage was the same syndicate of investors that owned the Scarritt Building and the Scarritt Arcade located directly to the northeast and north of the Waltower Building, respectively. The new owners announced

⁷ *Kansas City Star*, 30 July 1944, n. p.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Polk's Kansas City Directory*, (Kansas City: Gate City Publishing Company, 1949), 1216.

¹⁰ "A New Front For The Waltower Building," *The Kansas City Star*, 5 January 1958, 19E.

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that they planned to continue the modernization of the Waltower property, which apparently was never realized.¹¹

Albert C. Wiser, the architect of Kansas City's Waltower Building

Little has been written about Albert C. Wiser (1882-1937), in spite of the fact that he was a partner with Shepard, Farrar and Wiser— of one of Kansas City's most prestigious architectural firms that traces the beginning of its practice to 1887. A native of Rochester New York, Wiser came to Kansas City at the age of nine. His father, Edward B. Wiser, was widely recognized as a jewelry manufacturer. Wiser began his formal education at the University of Pennsylvania but became bored with the stringent curriculum requirements; consequently he returned to New York where he enrolled at Columbia University.¹²

Wiser launched his career in architecture as an apprentice and draftsman for Shepard and Farrar in 1902. Nine years later, Wiser became a partner and from 1911-1918 the firm was known as Shepard, Farrar and Wiser. Although Ernest H. Farrar had left the firm in 1910, when he moved to Maine to spend his retirement years, his name was retained until 1919 when the firm officially became known as Shepard and Wiser.¹³

Projects by Wiser while partners with Charles E. Shepard include the design for the Sophian Plaza Apartments, constructed in 1922-1923. Located at 4618 Warwick Boulevard, Kansas City, the elegant and stately apartment building was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in July 1983. Wiser, who considered the Sophian Plaza to be one of his most successful projects, designed a near duplicate luxury apartment building for a private concern in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Another of Wiser's designs while partnering was the Mission Hills Country Club, Mission Hills, Kansas, where he spent several years as a member.¹⁴ Wiser also assisted in the development of Research Hospital in Kansas City.

¹¹"Investors Buy the Waltower," *The Kansas City Star*, 12 July 1959, 1F.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³Sherry Piland, "Early Kansas City Architect: Charles E. Shepard." *Historic Kansas City News*, Vol. 5 (Dec. 1980 – Jan. 1981), 4-5.

¹⁴*Kansas City Times*, 18 May 1937, n. p.

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Wiser used his dynamic personality to promote the firm outside of the Kansas City market. He was responsible for opening offices in Tulsa, Oklahoma, Wichita, Kansas and Amarillo, Texas. While with Shepard, Wiser spearheaded several hotel commissions throughout the southwest. Hotel projects in the area include the Hotel President, Kansas City (listed in the Historic Downtown Hotel National Register District as a contributing building) and the Kansan Hotel, Topeka, Kansas.

After apprenticing and then partnering with Shepard for over twenty-five years, Wiser left the firm in 1927 to develop his own projects, including the promotion and financing of real estate construction. It was during his solo years that he designed the Gothicized Waltower Building, the only known building designed by Wiser in Kansas City when he was practicing on his own.¹⁵

Wiser spent the last two years of his life pursuing business activities in St. Louis but remained in Kansas City at his residence located at 3612 Walnut Street. Wiser, the last survivor of Shepard, Farrar and Wiser, died on May 17, 1937, at the age of 55. Frederick C. Pickett, who had been associated with the firm as a draftsman and then Shepard's partner after Wiser withdrew from the practice, asserted that:

[Wiser] was one of the most original men I ever knew. He detested red tape and stereotyped ways of doing things. What counted with him was accomplishment, and he would try new approaches to old problems, often with amazing success."¹⁶

At the time of his death, Wiser was survived by his daughter, Marion Doris Wiser who lived with him in Kansas City and a sister in New York City.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.* Pickett began his career with Shepard and Farrar in 1908 as a draftsman. After Shepard and Wiser dissolved their partnership in 1927, Shepard partnered with Pickett until 1931. After a devastating year of ill-health and dwindling commissions, Clarence E. Shepard died in 1932.

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Verbal Boundary Description

Lots 90 and 91, except the parts of said lots in Walnut Street, Ross and Scarritt's Addition, a subdivision in Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri, and the west half of the vacated alley lying east of and adjoining said lots, according to the recorded plat thereof.

Boundary Justification

The nominated property includes the entire parcel historically associated with the Waltower Building, Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri.

Key to Photographs

(John W. Gutowski, Kansas City, Missouri, photographer; all 4 x 5 negatives are the property of Architectural and Historical Research, LLC, Kansas City, Missouri.

1. West or main façade, view facing east.
2. South and main façade, view facing northeast.
3. North and main façade, view facing southeast.
4. Detail of the main façade storefront, view facing east.
5. Detail of the main façade storefront, view facing east.
6. Detail of the south façade storefront, view facing northeast.
7. Detail of the south façade storefront, view facing northeast.

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

39°07' 30" 94°37' 30"

3600000E 1692 500 METERS (KANS.) JR 25 E

R 331W

362

35°00' 9

364

92 500
METERS (KANS.)

The Walcott
Building
872 West
Camden St.
Jackson, Missouri
15/362250
4329470

